

The Emergence of a Jewish Cultural Archipelago in Isaac Goldemberg's *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner*

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to investigate the Jewish immigrant imaginary in Peru during the 1920's and 30's through Isaac Goldemberg's novel, *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner* (1976). The story revolves around Jacobo, a Russian Jew living in Peru, trying to piece together his life the night before he dies. The story recounts the major events of his twelve years in Peru through various newspaper clippings, historical events, cultural announcements and testimonies of his family and friends, including the disturbing words of his illegitimate son, Efraín. I attempt to make sense of this fragmented narrative and its wide-ranging implications on Jewish identity by construing a cultural archipelago that stretches from Israel to Russia to Europe and finally, Peru. This construction defends the multiplicity of the story's characters, all linked together by Jacobo, the story's protagonist and anti-hero of sorts; an overall representation of the transcendental Wandering Jew. With this analysis I will try to make the Jewish cultural archipelago an explanatory metaphor rather than a puzzling one. Geographically, an archipelago is a group of scattered islands; in this case helps to explain qualities related to a Diaspora, on cultural resistance, and on the dynamics of Jewish culture from the places they leave to the places they settle. Aside from the story, to further extend my thesis I have read several other scholarly texts that either critique Goldemberg's *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner* or deal with Jewish immigrant life in Latin America. Altogether, I believe my conclusions coincide with my initial theory that indeed there is evidence of a unique Jewish cultural archipelago and that this small Jewish community in Peru is imperative in understanding the social dynamics of Jews in a transnational framework. It is with Goldemberg's distinctive interpretation of Jewish identity in Latin America that upholds the backbone to portray the universality and complexity of socio-cultural isolation, integration and assimilation that still maintain the bridges to unite several worlds.

Introduction

Regarded as “one of the darkest portraits of the world of immigrant Jews in Latin America,” (Barr 12) Isaac Goldemberg’s *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner* (1978), appeared first in its English translation, *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner* in 1976, offers an abstruse outlook on the fragility of the human condition. Records show Jews converted or disguised as Christians (*conversos*) first arrived in the Americas with Christopher Columbus (Stavans 1). In any event, the majority of Jews arrived in the Americas during three pivotal historical movements: after the late fifteenth-century expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian kingdoms (Spanish/Portuguese Inquisition), during the late nineteenth-century crisis of pogroms and famine in Eastern Europe, and at the time of the Holocaust (Elkin). Most of these immigrants were Ashkenazim, Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe, while smaller proportions were either Mizrachim from the Near East and Ottoman Empire or Sephardic Jews from Iberia whose native language is Ladino (Elkin). Essentially, since colonial times, Latin America has become recognized as one of the key regions for Jews of all backgrounds to escape persecution and seek refuge from their homeland (Elkin). Migrating to Latin America was a relatively trouble-free process because several Latin American countries engaged in open-door immigration policies, hoping to attract hard-working immigrants to boost their economies in times of worldwide recession.

“Goldemberg’s work reflects a painful search for identity and an expression of his conflictive roots” (Barr 13)—with Goldemberg, his only refuge was outside of Peruvian borders. Isaac Goldemberg was born in 1945, in Chepén, Peru, and spent most of his adolescent years discovering what it meant to be Jewish in a predominantly Catholic society. His mother was a mix of Indian, Spanish and English descent while his father was a Bessarabian Jew who did not

come into Isaac's life until he was eight when he moved to Lima to live with his father and attended Jewish day school (Barr 12). After he completed the Peruvian military academy, where he was ostracized and alienated for being Jewish, his father sent him to Israel to study agronomy (Barr 12). Later Goldemberg returned to Peru with his pregnant wife. There he found no familial ties and no means of support so the couple packed up and moved to New York, where they currently reside. In his first novel, *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner*, he imposed a pastiche, a mosaic of sorts, putting together pieces of his personal life, Peruvian history, various narrative modes, biblical and cultural references (Barr 20). Incorporating the theory of Post-Structuralism, Goldemberg, like many Latin American Jewish authors, creates narratives with a common theme of the amendatory encoding of the Jewish subject into Latin American history (Sheinin 23). As for the time frame of Goldemberg's novel, it was during a standstill period, in between two World Wars, where rising anti-Semitism in Europe started to trickle down to Latin American countries, inflicting the Jewish population with feelings of paranoia and fear for what was to come.

This unique work of fiction is a representation of the Jewish immigrant experience in Peru from 1923 to 1935. The novel contains four distinctive types of discourse interspersed throughout the text: ten chapters in which a third-person omniscient narrator focuses on Jacobo; eleven chapters of interior monologue (six devoted to Efraín, Jacobo's son, two to Jacobo's friend and fellow salesman, Samuel Edelman, and one each to Sara Lerner, Jacobo's sister-in-law, to Miriam Abramowitz, Sara's sister and Jacobo's ex-fiancée, and finally to Juana Paredes, his Peruvian mistress); selected entries from the *Alma Hebrea* [Jewish Soul] magazine; and *Crónicas* [Chronicles], short articles chronologically documenting the years 1923 to 1935.

In this paper, I hope to illuminate what I have termed a “Jewish cultural archipelago” and demonstrate how Goldemberg’s novel wholly represents this notion. I first heard of the cultural archipelago in my undergraduate Spanish Senior Seminar course where my instructor, Professor Ulises Juan Zevallos-Aguilar, applied the term in several of our readings and then later we had to incorporate it into our final essay which centered on a Latin American novel. I learned a great deal from that course—it has motivated me to take his delineation of the archipelago and using my perspective, expand on the term in the structure of a thesis. As such, I will start off explaining each of the general components that fall under the creation of the archipelago: the formation of islands and how permeable their borders are; the clarification of the water that flows in between these islands; and what this sort of space represents on a socio-cultural level. All in all, with the first chapter of my thesis I wish to expand the reader’s realm of a geographical archipelago into something more profound. Metaphorically speaking, into a special setting where an archipelago is a community; islands are identities or nationalities; borders signify how isolated or integrated an individual or group is; and the water is this concept of space, both physical and psychological that creates certain waves or patterns that are of great importance in this study.

The second chapter, I specifically focus on the “Island Phenomenon” or certain characteristics that stand out among the characters and nationalities represented in the novel. Almost as if these subjects have a kind of “Island Fever”—there are serious cases of greed, isolation and fragmentation. Of course this is not an exclusive list; there are many more themes to be drawn from this story, it is simply my opinion that these three are some of the more important ones that also carry with it smaller sub-themes.

In the third chapter I feature to what extent the characters on these islands build and break inter-personal, societal and/or religious bridges. The first part reveals how connections are made or destroyed from the Old World to the New World. The Old World represents the Eastern Hemisphere, where the immigrants were originally from, and the New World is their new residence in the Western Hemisphere. The second part deals with Samuel Edelman, a Jewish salesman and how he connects the Jews in Lima to the Jews in Chepén. Lastly, in the third section, we see how Jacobo, the story's protagonist, creates the most important network: linking Jews and Peruvians. Each of these connections contain constructive as well as destructive elements and in studying Goldemberg's work, it becomes apparent how these bridges mold the character and their role in society.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I apply the concept, *polyphonic bricolage*, termed by cultural anthropologist, Bettina E. Schmidt, to demonstrate that the islands in this archipelago consist of one discrete entity, representing a culture unique to the rest of the world. According to Schmidt, a culture is never completed and in an ongoing state of change while the different voices that make up the culture must be equally valued by not merging them to form one homogenous entity.

Overall my goal is to explain the intricacy of the characters and how this conglomeration of personalities crafts a multifarious cultural archipelago that has the potential to be applied to any immigrant community, not just the Jewish populace. Not one of the novel's critics mentions any kind of evidence of a cultural archipelago, instead they contribute several ideas on certain themes and lines of reasoning that can still be incorporated into my specific claim. Nevertheless, there are a few scholars mentioned in Ulises Juan Zevallos-Aguilar's article on the Andean cultural archipelago, who explore the idea in a socio-cultural context, just not from a Jewish

perspective, which is sufficient because the construction of the archipelago is quite universal. As Sheinin and Barr so clearly state:

There is a panorama of vantage points: ties with the Old World, the encounter with the New, the literary legacy, the trials of adaptation, new forms of persecution, the dialectic of custom and assimilation and of faith and activism, the conflict of national allegiance to Israel, generational conflict, the writer in exile, questions of aesthetics... (27)

This quote is an inspiration that has helpfully guided my research. Goldemberg's particular take on this small, diverse population in Peru provides the platform from which to examine the reaction acceded by host societies to an exotic community who does not conform to Catholic and Hispanic cultural norms (Elkin). In reading and writing Goldemberg, I have realized how convoluted his contribution is towards building a stable bridge between being Jewish and being Latin American.

Chapter One: Constructing the Jewish cultural archipelago

“The closed worlds that emerge in the novel suggest that there is little hope for the flawed characters that inhabit them.” (Rosser 44)

The idea that there exists a Jewish cultural archipelago in *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner* is the all-encompassing, driving theme to my investigation. This concept which I am going to explore throughout the study helps to explain the dynamics of culture and society in a global dimension (Zevallos-Aguilar 134). Historically, in this specific situation there was a wave of international migration of Jews to the Western Hemisphere during the first few decades of the twentieth century thanks to severe anti-Semitic political policies, implemented by the Eastern European governments first, and then parts of Western Europe during the Nazi regime. None of the Jewish characters mention exactly why they migrated overseas to Peru; while certain historical events suggest a few reasons, because Goldemberg does not go into detail on the push/pull factors of their migration, this is not a theme I am going to spotlight.

Be that as it may, once settled in Latin America, the Jews formed their own communities and in many respects maintained a connection between their homeland and their new residence. In this story the new residence is in Peru, mainly Lima and the surrounding provincial towns of Chepén and Chiclayo. The archipelago represents an assortment of unique characters from Goldemberg’s novel, so in that respect, each island represents a character in the story, stretching from the Holy Land through Russia and Europe and into South America’s Peru. Each island possesses its own identity and link to the other land forms. This upcoming section ‘a’ is really structured to become acquainted with the primary and secondary characters of the novel and in Chapter Three, the building and breaking of bridges between characters and their respective homelands will be discussed. There are a few characters who do not undertake any kind of physical journey from one country to another, but are still affected by the relationships they form

with these migratory Jews. In a nutshell, how the islands form, what kinds of borders they craft and what significance does water or the space separating the islands hold—are the critical questions that will guide the following section on the construction of the Jewish cultural archipelago.

a) The Formation of Islands and their Borders

We already understand that an archipelago is an agglomeration of islands, yet in this segment, it will be understood how a work of fiction constructs a very different archipelago that educates the reader on a novel's intricacies. In an informative study of the Andean cultural archipelago: "Archipelago leaves room for reflection on qualities related to a Diaspora, on cultural resistance, and on the dynamics of Andean [Jewish] culture between the places emigrants leave and where they settle" (Zevallos-Aguilar 132). Bearing that in mind, the Jewish cultural archipelago consists of the following islands: main characters Jacobo Lerner and his son, Efraín; secondary characters León Mitrani, Samuel Edelman, Moisés Lerner, Sara Lerner, Miriam Abramowitz, Juana Paredes, and the family of don Efraín Wilson.

Since all of the characters in Peru, we will focus on that aspect and how the other entities (the Holy Land, Russia, Europe) still impact them in determining the kind of boundaries they will form. It is here in Peru where Jews were put to the test in terms of their Jewish identity and conforming to a homogenous society: "Llama la atención que estas informaciones ocupen un reducido espacio y que en la misma sección aparezcan detalles sobre la vida de la colectividad judía" (Castañeda 297) [It calls to attention that these pieces of information occupy a confined space and in that same section appear details on the life of the Jewish community]¹. Of course,

¹ *Technical note:* Throughout my thesis, I translated each of the quotations in Spanish to the best of my ability. While there was no English translation for Castañeda's essay, there was an English translation to Rojo's book, but the quotes I employed from his version only needed simple translating so I did it myself.

this story is not just about Jews, it is about local Peruvians and one special case, Efraín, torn between the worlds of his Russian Jewish father and Peruvian Catholic mother.

Moreover, I would like to point out that Jacobo should not be considered the center of this archipelago because he is the story's protagonist. Truth be told, there are no centers to a geographical archipelago, hence in this cultural archipelago there are none either because there is no one definition of Jewish identity. In other words, identities are scattered and cannot be grounded in one area. This specific archipelagic conjunction is extremely disorganized because of the multiplicity of its components: "veremos como se nos despliega la variedad y vitalidad de la colonia judía de la época" (Castañeda 297) [We are able to see how the variety and the vitality of the Jewish colony spreads out over time]. The aim of this segment focuses on the collective behavior of Jews and how even when they migrate all over the world, their histories still shape them and whether or not this becomes problematic is contingent on the person. As we will begin to see, the border can become a social space for the emergence of new identities.

To start off, Jacobo Lerner and León Mitrani, Jacobo's childhood friend who resides in Chepén, are two dynamic Jewish individuals who build similar islands in the story. These characters share similar socio-cultural components, forming borders that inherently create conflictive additions to the Jewish cultural archipelago. Neither one of them is able to adapt and contribute normally to Peruvian society; as a result they will spend their lives suffering from this deficiency. Jacobo initially strives to follow in the footsteps of his brother, Moisés, but ends up taking the wrong path and follows Mitrani's ill-fated track instead. Mitrani, the symbol of "dream turned nightmare" (Friedman 73) arrived in Peru before Jacobo and established himself in Chepén, a small town north of Peru's capital. Unfortunately, his life was plagued from the start. He married a blind, Catholic woman who threatened to kill him and was considered a

lunatic by the townspeople. Consequently, his friends abandoned him, his local business failed and he was constantly bothered by the priest to convert. Ironically, “What he [Jacobo] did not say, perhaps for fear of making Mitrani furious, was that he would not like to find himself one day in Mitrani’s situation” (71). Jacobo tries his hardest not to follow Mitrani’s path by running away from Chepén as soon as Bertila, a local town girl, becomes pregnant with his son. In any event, running away from his responsibilities inevitably puts him on that wretched track: with the abandonment of friends and family together with the rejection of the Jewish community in Lima and the Peruvian town of Chepén. Mitrani’s attempt to overly expose himself as a religious fanatic in Chepén along with Jacobo’s attempt to run away every time he draws negative attention to himself generates two very weak and fractured exterior borders.

To continue on, Russian Jews Moisés Lerner and Samuel Edelman are static characters who contribute much differently to the story’s archipelago, taking on a more positive, less destructive position in its assembly. What differentiates them is the permeability of their borders, conveying the extent of their cultural resistance—Moisés Lerner is definitely more power-hungry than Edelman who chooses to live a quiet life away from the Jewish community, in the rural town of Chiclayo.

Moisés becomes the President of the Hebrew Union and along with his wife, Sara they organize many cultural, leisurely and philanthropic events geared towards strengthening the community and aiding Jews in the assimilation process. As much good as Moisés does for the Jewish community, he utterly fails when it comes to maintaining a good relationship with his elder brother, Jacobo. Moisés is street-smart and takes advantage of Jacobo’s vulnerability by squandering a hefty portion of his savings on a shoddy business deal. Even so, Moisés retains

tight boundaries, only associating himself with the prosperous Jewish community and ignoring or ripping off the rest.

On the other hand, Samuel Edelman, a traveling salesman, is extremely fortunate in that he maintains a healthy balance between the Jewish society and Chiclayo, where he resides peacefully with his Catholic wife and two boys. He differentiates himself from the protagonist by declaring: “I never went after the things that seduced Jacobo. Marry a Jewish woman? Fine. And if there aren’t any? How long must one wait?” (22). Samuel implores the example of marriage as a synecdoche to stand for all of Jacobo’s obsessions that turned him mad.

Edelman serves the Jewish community by writing frequently to the local magazine, *Alma Hebrea* or *Hebrew Soul* expressing his views on Jews and the assimilation process. According to one article, if it were not for his valiant efforts to preserve the Jewish culture, the Hebrew Union in Lima would not exist. Curiously, Edelman is the only character who expresses himself in Spanish. Even though it is broken and grammatically incorrect, by applying the colloquial language to his way of life this means that Edelman is making a noticeable attempt to become a full member to Peruvian society. Esther Castañeda adds:

Su intervención [escribiendo en español] es la única con tal característica y este deseo de otorgarle ese efecto ‘realista’ nos puede llevar a suponer que en el fondo es el judío más integro y que por lo tanto es la opción propuesta por el autor” (296). [His intervention, of writing in Spanish, is the only one with such a characteristic, and this desire grants him that realistic effect allowing us to assume that he is the Jew most integrated and therefore is the author’s recommended option]

Additionally, Edelman supplies critical information and judgments such as describing the death of León Mitrani and the dreadful condition of Efraín. As we will delve into later, Samuel’s greatest contribution to this archipelago is acting as the link between Jacobo in Lima and Mitrani and Efraín in Chepén; relaying messages personal, national and international, back and forth between places. Disappointingly, his role as a messenger does not seem to relieve any of the

psychological, social and physical ailments these characters face throughout the book; his assistance only goes so far. Regardless, his societal position is ideal and his permeable borders allow him to become well-acclimated in Peruvian society. He is able to turn inward to his community when necessary and, at the same time, maintain a successful familial life raising his children Jewish with a wife who is Catholic.

Sara Lerner, the wife of Moisés, and Miriam Abramowitz, widow to Daniel Abramowitz and ex-fiancée to Jacobo, are Austrian Jews inflicted with the same situation as brothers Jacobo and Moisés. Moisés is the brother who has all the luck in terms of flourishing in the Jewish community and marrying Sara, a prosperous Jewish woman. This couple's good fortune is not as uncontaminated as one may think—later, in the section on Greed, I will corroborate on the superficiality of the affluent Jewish commune in Lima. Under these circumstances, Miriam and Jacobo are the black ducks of their families and each carry their own set of adversities. Miriam, by far the most acerbic of the bunch has suffered the suicide of her husband, social ostracism and a revoked marriage to Jacobo after Juana's sister, Delia informed her of Jacobo's infidelity. Inside each of the sisters' passages which take place on the same day, there is not much depth to their characters. Both gossip about the local Jewish community, talk of upcoming events and Miriam wonders if Sara will show up to go to the movies with her. In my opinion, these two stream-of-conscious monologues reveal that the sisters live in a bubble and focus their thoughts solely on their Jewish neighbors, not paying the slightest attention to the outside world.

In continuance, Juana Paredes, Jacobo's mistress for five years and Bertila Wilson, Jacobo's former lover and the birthmother of their son, Efraín, are two local Peruvians who find themselves caught up in the web of the Jewish characters by way of Jacobo. Juana, a hardy,

religious woman is seen as a diversion for Jacobo, taking his mind off his agonizing everyday life and for a short time making him feel like a normal human being. We can see how the islands of Jacobo and Juana converge and support each other to an extent; still the two will never understand the island of the other. Their borders, while touching, in no way will ever be broken by marriage, which Jacobo thinks as taboo (a Jew marrying a Christian). In her twenty-four hour passage, Juana reveals her sincere desire to be Efraín's surrogate mother once Jacobo passes and how her affection for Jacobo conflicts with the teaching of the Catholic Church:

What am I going to confess if I go? That I have sinned, period? Where have I sinned, Father? For the last four years I have been going to bed with an infidel. He is an infidel but he is good, Father. He is a fine man, Father. He is charitable. Mortal Sin? God has punished him and he is going to die. I beg you to take pity on him, Father. (140)

Additionally, Juana explains the love triangle between her, Miriam and Jacobo and how Delia took an aggressive approach in what she thought would unite Jacobo and Juana in marriage. Delia, pretending to be Juana, confronted Miriam and informed her of Jacobo's sexual relations with Juana and phony affair with Sara. On the whole, at least Juana's intentions seem earnest and I believe her contribution is harmonious to the archipelago; she carries no anti-Semitic attitude thus making her borders approachable to the Jewish population.

Bertila Wilson, called Virginia in the Spanish version, is the Peruvian under the most torment after being abandoned by her one and only love, Jacobo. This rejection completely destroys her, turning her into a psychotic, suicidal and an all-around illegitimate mother to her son. Her identity make-up is totally marred and we hear of her meanderings exclusively from Efraín. Having a baby out of wedlock with a Jew in a rural Peruvian town is never easy to deal with and one is bound to feel society's banishment, especially when the father flees before the baby is even born: "She [Bertila] was half-drowned when they pulled her out and screaming they should let her die because she was so ashamed and would never again set foot in the street" (12).

While her perimeters were crushed by Jacobo's cowardly flight, she then turns inward and creates a tight, thick-rimmed border so that no one can enter and hurt her once more.

Bertila's Anglo-Hispanic family, the Wilson Rebolledos, is the exaggerated version of your typical misfit family. The family consists of Bertila; a sister who ran away with her lover; two other promiscuous sisters who go out constantly; a good-for-nothing brother; an unmarried, overly pious aunt; and a superstitious mother. To expand on this, I will cite Castañeda: "Cada miembro de los Wilson se convierte en una víctima del medio familiar y social, que los humilla, hundiéndolos en estados demenciales o en inercias estériles" (297) [Each member of the Wilson Family turns into a victim of the middle-class which is humiliating to them, sinking them into demented states or useless beings]. The head of the household is don Efraín Wilson and being from a remote rural area, not having real contact with other Jews, Bertila's father allows Jacobo to cross their family's borders only because he thinks of Jacobo, a shop owner in Chepén, as your typical money-hungry, business-savvy Jew who would make the perfect match to his love-struck daughter, Bertila. Nevertheless, what happened between Jacobo and don Efraín became a fake business negotiation planned by Jacobo and once he fled, don Efraín realized his scheme and took it as a personal blow. To further add to the fire, when Bertila announced her pregnancy, "don Efraín understood at last that the Jew 'had given it to him up the ass'" (86).

With that being said, our final personality is Efraín, the gloomy, lonely, deranged son of Bertila and Jacobo. Efraín's discourse, like his life, reflects a hunger for identity and a consciousness of his difference within his surroundings. Born in 1925, Efraín's story begins in 1932, as an innocent and obedient child, brought up Catholic by his Aunt Francisca. Towards the end of the novel in 1935 (the same year Jacobo dies), Efraín's awareness of his social and familial isolation quickly transforms him into a perturbed psychological mess. His condition

corresponds to other Jewish characters, suggesting a failure on behalf of generations of Jews to be fully accepted in Peruvian society (Goldberg 64). Growing up, Efraín has to deal with his family's hostility towards his absent Jewish father and the open anti-Semitic attitudes that stemmed from his strict Catholic upbringing. Early on in his passages, Efraín responds to everyone who denounced his father and his Jewish ancestry by reaffirming his commitment to the Catholic Church, thereby conforming to the expectations of his mother's family: "I'm not going to die like my father because I am a good boy who goes to mass every Sunday" (11). In spite of his attempts, the unyielding animosity felt by his mother's family towards Jacobo, becomes redirected to Efraín, who in turn begins to exhibit similar psychological and physiological symptoms that Jacobo incurs, in the form of chronic dizzy spells, nausea, fatigue and nightmares (Goldberg 64).

The novel's exclusive circular plot is shown in the final chapter where Efraín, Jacobo's protégé emerges as "a pathetic figure" demoted to jabbering crazily and torturing spiders (Rosser 48). Harry Rosser remarks wisely: "If his father Jacobo was unable to reconcile his past and his present, Efraín cannot reconcile his past, his present, and his future,—a bleak commentary on the Peruvian dream of combining the best from different races in the citizens of tomorrow" (48). In summary, Efraín takes similar shape to his father and his borders become trampled on and worthless; slowly but surely immersing himself into the deep waters of despair.

b) The Symbolism of Water

In concordance with the previous discussion on the formation of unique islands and the borders that envelop them, it is necessary to raise the question of the waters that fill the spaces between the islands of the Jewish cultural archipelago. Water, according to Goldemberg, does not betoken life, but the slow dying process certain characters face when traveling to new places:

“His life seemed like a trip that began in Chepén and ended in Staraya Ushitza [a town in Russia], in front of the abandoned body of his father, and as if Lima were a weightless region somewhere between these two spaces” (31). Strangely, Jacobo’s narrator describes his life backwards starting in Chepén and ending in Staraya Ushitza. Lima, the city Jacobo resides the longest, is the region that floats aimlessly between the two grounded areas, perhaps implying that Jacobo has formed no roots in Lima so there is nothing to keep him stable and stop him from psychologically wandering from place to place or past to present.

The idea that water can be a negative element is also corroborated by Antonio Benítez Rojo’s *La isla que se repite* and his delineation of the Chaos theory. Chaos is when you have disorder that bonds with what we already know about nature, providing a space where the natural sciences connect with cultural traditions, “...donde la tierra es todo y el mar es un recuerdo olvidado” (xiv) [where the land is everything and the sea is a forgotten memory]. This concept produces a winding culture where time spreads out irregularly and resists to be captured by the cycle of the clock or calendar. In fact, the stages of identity construction form a cyclical pattern starting with Jacobo’s death then dispersing into various fragments of his life, going in and out of chronological order, eventually ending with the assumed death of Jacobo’s son, Efraín. Similar to what he described with the Caribbean islands, the Jewish cultural archipelago is capricious in its underwater currents, waves, folds, fluidity and bumps (Rojo). Altogether, this space generates a meta-archipelagic culture; a returning Chaos, a detour without purpose, a continuous flow of paradoxes and a feedback machine of asymmetrical processes like the sea, the wind and the clouds (Rojo).

Consequently, this “submerged population group” (Rosser 46) with which Goldemberg deals, allows water to become a place where characters are trapped in between islands of Jews

and non-Jews, either falling into the deep depths of the sea or floating on the surface between waves. For that reason, a new, more complex metaphor is formed from water, creating certain patterns we can easily distinguish throughout the text: namely the act of drowning, allegorical sea creatures and the persistent rain. Here, water implies that almost everyone is affected by the hardships of productive integration within the host society.

Drowning in the waters of this archipelago suggests the ruined lives that are unable to survive on land with the rest of society. There are a handful of characters that dream of someone drowning, imagine themselves drowning or truly almost drown. Samuel Edelman, an insightful man, calls his fellow Jews or really any immigrant, a “shipwreck victim” (26) and “the first thing a shipwreck victim does as soon as he is on land is find company, someone with whom to face the dangers.” Samuel Edelman is one of the few recovered victims, whilst Bertila, Efraín, Mitrani and Jacobo are re-victimized and never experience a successful recovery.

Bertila’s incident is the most unembellished. She actually attempts suicide in a local river, jumping into the deepest part, knowing she cannot swim. Her reasoning is somewhat understandable; Jacobo, the father to her newborn baby had abandoned them and never returned, leaving Bertila ashamed, helpless and extremely alone. Her despair and inability to relate to anyone leaves her caught in between islands of Jacobo and her family. These destructive feelings immediately consume Efraín who also feels out of place and torn between his Jewish roots from a father he has never met and the uptight Catholic influences from the local priest and his pious aunt.

Like mother like son, Efraín is also conversant with drowning. Both Efraín and Mitrani seem to have a sixth sense for what will happen to Chepén; possibly because they are looking from the outside inwards. Efraín has to bear the family’s resentment towards his father and

towards what Efraín represents: a could-have-been profitable union between rich Jew and poor town girl, gone completely amiss. After the frightening scene where the town harasses Mitrani, dubbing him the King of the Jews and forcing him to reenact the death of Christ, Efraín discloses an unforgettable insight: "...the curse is really going to fall on this town now. One day the water is going to spill out above the gate and we are all going to drown" (126). The water spilling over the gate is a fascinating representation where water serves as a fatal punishment to the town for partaking in this malicious confrontation. Efraín, trying anything to save himself from his deadly fantasies:

I never call Bertila... because I know she never comes, and I try to hold onto a rock to save myself. But the rock is covered with thick slime that is very slippery, and the current sweeps me away while the rock stays behind laughing like a giant face that I do not recognize. (12)

In this short passage, we see once again Chaos taking the shape; this time as a strong current carrying Efraín into the abyss, with nothing sturdy to cling on to. The rock turns into a face Efraín does not recognize, because in his life, Efraín has no one to turn to and even when he tries to form relationships, like with Father Chirinos and Aunt Francisca, they are never genuine enough to last.

Mitrani, similar to Efraín, prophesizes about a biblical catastrophe similar to what took place in the Old Testament: "...the river will flood the houses, we will all drown, the anger of God will fall on our heads like a sword, no one in this village will be saved because we are all damned..." (13). Efraín witnesses Mitrani's religious rants on a daily basis and does not seem to be affected by this one in particular. In fact, after Mitrani's troubling prediction, Efraín questions if the world ends that he might have the chance to meet his father. Sadly, Efraín realizes the only chance he has to see his father is if there was an apocalyptic event where everyone drowned—not likely to happen. Mitrani detects the superficiality and promiscuity of the village and is not

afraid to announce to Chepén that they are all doomed under God's wrath which will come in the form of severe flooding. Water, in this case, takes the shape of a torturing device that will destroy everyone in its path.

After Mitrani died some unknown death, Samuel Edelman goes out looking for the body and that night dreams of his version of Mitrani's death: "I saw him drowned in the river and burned in a fire" (168). Edelman, being a Jewish immigrant, understands quite well what it means to figuratively drown in a place like Peru. Mitrani could not handle the pressures of assimilation, especially in a small town where bigotry was great and religions other than Catholicism were intolerable. Hence, he fell between the cracks and was lost at sea, no one really knowing what happened to him after he died.

Jacobo, our final victim, is, according to Juana Paredes' dream, at the bottom of the sea. Being completely submerged equates being totally and forever marginalized from his own people and the rest of society; in other words, eternally stuck between the world of non-Jews and Jews, his past and his present. While Juana envisions Jacobo's entrapment under water, Jacobo believes the opposite. Paradoxically, in Jacobo's third- person voice, he describes his relationship with doña Juana: "as if he were in a familiar landscape, on a wide plain that reminded him of Bertila's diffused shyness" (150). Apparently, Jacobo feels normal, as though he is grounded on land with Juana, most likely because she is not Jewish and carries no long-term past with Jacobo. Whenever Jacobo would leave his brother's house, he did not feel real and was hesitant with every step, his soul "full of old shipwrecks" (150). Subconsciously, Juana knows Jacobo is exceptionally suffering and the time they spend together temporarily relieves his internal afflictions. Additionally, as the story unfolds, Jacobo spends more time at the brothel he owns and comes to experience a positive sensation that pervades the emptiness of his past,

“...with something he scarcely understood. It was like diving into a well of warm, comforting waters. Moved by his fervor, Jacobo began to go to the synagogue every day” (150). Ironically enough, Jacobo visualizes himself in a tight, enclosed, uncomfortable place, swimming in its soothing waters. Considering this vision supposedly turned him around and made him religious, demonstrates Jacobo’s warped mentality. Then again, his chances of straightening out his memories are just as hopeless as untangling a mess of underwater seaweed, where Jacobo subconsciously resides.

Sea creatures in Goldemberg’s narrative serve as allegorical creatures that are contaminated with cynicism in this assessment of island waters. First, after Efraín witnesses the town violently mock Mitrani for being a fanatical Jew, Efraín imagines the town is done for; everyone is going to drown and the crabs are going to eat them alive. Taking into consideration the vivid imagination of this young, disturbed boy one cannot be exactly sure if imploring crabs as human-eaters holds any further insinuations, but what we can infer is that Efraín knows a vicious action as such deserves incredible punishment. Not only is their town going to drown, but they are going to die much more brutally because of their actions.

Jacobo brings forth a more mature version of the metaphoric sea creatures in his letter to the editor of the *Jewish Soul* concerning his views on the integration of Jew in Peru. He is responding to Samuel Edelman’s letter which wrote very favorably on Jewish integration. Jacobo, in contrast, believes “the assimilation that threatens us is like a terrible octopus. Its tentacles take in all the members of our community, our children, our young people” (95). This letter carries substance because this is one of the only times Jacobo is relayed in first-person, allowing for enhanced deliberation on his character and personal perspective. Evidently, Jacobo is under the impression that certain forms of assimilation like inter-marriage or denying one’s

ethnicity take on the form of an octopus and affect all members of the community. Once again we see this affixation with aquatic life and how its chaos and exposure brings about devastation within a population.

Rain, the last affiliation with water, comes about subtly in the novel and seems to be a random side note that interrupts the stream-of-conscious of secondary characters, Sara Lerner and Miriam Abramowitz. Both of these women are pretty well-adjusted to the Jewish community in Lima; Sara more so than Miriam. Regardless, the mention of rain does occur more than once in these two chapters so I will make a point to incorporate this element into my analysis of water, especially because it is relevant to Rojo's Chaos theory.

As we well know, rain, is a part of the water cycle where water from bodies of water evaporates, forms clouds and when the clouds fill up just enough, it rains. Putting this concept under literary scrutiny, we can see that rain comes from the water dispersed between islands, basically a no man's land, where the forgotten and marginalized often times reside because they are too weak to establish themselves properly on land. Bodies of water, as depicted in *La isla que se repite*, are especially unstable, yet still sustain a certain pattern in its waves, tides and currents. Sara and Miriam's depiction of rain proves that they still are not completely satisfied living in Peru. They both have their doubts and constantly noticing the rain causes them to think of their home country and those who still have not psychologically found their niche on Peruvian soil.

When Sara Lerner brings up the rain in Lima, she does it with nostalgia, comparing the rain in Lima to the rain in Vienna, where she is from: "Rain, rain, it's been raining since yesterday. It is a sad rain. In Vienna the rain is gayer, it seems to sing" (111). In comparison, Miriam, like Sara, does equate the rain in Lima to Vienna, but she goes a little further and in one of her comments adds: "It was raining like this when Jacobo came to propose to me...But time

had broken into little pieces and the rain started to fall, thin and persistent, and I couldn't really hope for anything like that [her happy marriage with Daniel] with Jacobo, could I?" (64). Miriam appears to be taking the rain as a sign that marrying Jacobo would never be as fulfilling as her marriage with her dead husband. While time is scattered, rain is consistently falling in Miriam's life and like the case of the two brothers, Jacobo and Moisés, Sara has experienced the dream and Miriam the nightmare (Friedman 77).

Chapter Two: Island Phenomenon

“The theme of solitude and exile is an integral part of the Latin American condition. I believe that to be a Latin American, even in one’s own country, is to be in exile.” –Isaac Goldemberg (The Washington Post)

The Jew of the Diaspora persists as a “landless, nation-less wanderer capable nevertheless of maintaining a distinct personal identity and collective affiliation” (Goldberg 59). This powerful quote defends what I mean by the popular expression known as “Island Fever” and the application it holds for themes of Greed, Isolation and Fragmentation. From my standpoint, being a minority member in a multi-racial, yet wholly Catholic setting causes personal stress and problems often related to *Island Fever*. *Island Fever* embraces deeper meaning—the feeling of being closed in by surrounding ethnic groups rather than by water. Separation of family, friends and familiar surroundings can come as a shock to the newly settled, as they are lured by visions of a safe haven, economic opportunity and simplicity of life. Rabbi León Klenicki includes that “Immigrants were typically concerned with earning a living and were, in general, indifferent to the social limitations of Latin American ‘toleration’” (5). In Peru, there was an established Jewish community so newly arrived immigrants would have support if needed and fitting in would not be of major concern. Goldemberg suggests, through the activities of his characters, that economic opportunities may be good for Jewish people but the psychological ones are far from it. In the following paragraphs I will take three exclusive paths in the quest to unravel the mysterious case of *Island Fever* in *The fragmented life of don Jacobo Lerner*.

a) An Ambiance of Greed

Greed: A personality trait that tends to shed light in island living when you have a small, vulnerable area that attracts outsiders as the perfect spot to take advantage of abundant natural resources without having to show the slightest concern towards the local population. In this case,

while the extremists in the Jewish community go mad in their own way, the non-deranged members are circumscribed more along the lines of narrow and disappointing lives (Rosser 48). While they do enjoy some sense of collective identity and support, surviving at the hand of religious opposition, there is a general absence of a spiritual, uplifting, personal nature and as Edelman points out: “There is no Jewish atmosphere in Lima” (23). On an individual level, people’s lives are superficial, characterized by petty dealings, shallow values and tentative efforts at self-protection through naturalization. Greed manifests its own ambience equally in the Jewish and Peruvian networks, confirming its universal nature especially when confined in such a small space.

First of all, when it comes to Jacobo’s money, nothing is kept secret. Everyone wonders what Jacobo will do with his fortune once he dies. Juana expresses her thoughts about this matter: “I don’t want him [Jacobo] to believe that I have no self-respect and that I’m only interested in his money. But who is he going to leave it to?” (136). When Sara learns that Jacobo would prefer her and Moisés to take care of Efraín, she is favorable to the idea, stating that it would be the only way to get Jacobo’s money and “the community would speak so well of us if we take care of the child” (117). As I stated earlier, Juana is the only one with sincere intentions to raise Efraín, but she is not Jewish so that prospect is out of the question in Jacobo’s mind., Juana’s selfish sister, Delia, manipulates Miriam into thinking that Jacobo has multiple mistresses, under the impression that Miriam would end the engagement and Jacobo would turn around and marry Juana instead. Clearly, if Juana were to marry Jacobo, it would give Delia the perfect opportunity to take advantage of Jacobo’s riches. Miriam does cancel the wedding but makes it seem as though it was Jacobo’s idea. Samuel Edelman foresees the marriage as corrupt and avows “Thank God that Jacobo canceled the wedding. Miriam was only after his

money...Better to marry a Christian than a bad Jewish woman” (22). Of course, Jacobo is also overzealous when it comes to money and the novel proves: “Jacobo Lerner had come to Chepén with only one goal, making money” (71).

Likewise, in Chepén, don Efraín Wilson appears to be under the same spell. Jacobo sets up his shop in Chepén and don Efraín is immediately impressed, imagining a special connection between the two: “...they were both foreigners and both had the firm intention of increasing their wealth as quickly as possible by abstaining from unnecessary luxuries” (45). Don Efraín recognizes a money-hungry man when he sees one because he is the same way. He also believes he can take advantage of the chemistry between Jacobo and his daughter Bertila: “Trusting that something profitable would ensue from the relations between the Jew and his daughter” (57). Nevertheless, don Efraín’s greedy behavior is one of his greatest infirmities so obviously he is completely taken aback when Jacobo flees the town as soon as Bertila tells him she is with child.

After Efraín is born, Jacobo contributes in the only way he knows how, through money. He sends money to his son, Efraín, every month and it soon becomes obvious that the stipend is being embezzled by don Efraín, the grandfather. Case in point, the first sentence Efraín utters in the novel is: “I don’t know why Grandfather stuffs himself while we’re half-starved” (9). The money clearly is not going to Efraín and while “Grandmother says it is because there is no money, but Grandfather has such a steak every day that Iris, Ricardo, and I drool” (9). Grandfather probably thinks he has every right to Jacobo’s money after he betrayed him with the business deal and his daughter, so this is his way of getting even. Throughout the remainder of the story, don Efraín never once says Jacobo’s name—to him, “The only important thing is that the Jew goes on sending you money every month” (15).

Furthermore, within the Jewish community, there are members that are very materialistic and shallow-minded. Samuel Edelman decisively stays away from the community because he does not agree with their superficial behavior. Even in the synagogue this sort of conduct occurs: “It’s good to go the synagogue when one believes in those things, but how many times men go to speak of business and women to show off their jewelry?” (22) In the same way, while Jacobo is possessed by Mitrani’s spirit he becomes fanatically religious and goes to the synagogue on a regular basis, frightening the parishioners with his daily ranting: “His voice was breaking with anger, he asked them to notice the luxury of their dress; he reproached them for their devotion to everything material” (151). From afar, the Peruvian community notices the showiness of the Jews as well. Delia’s harsh words with Miriam had a lackadaisical effect on her: “Because we, she said ‘you’ and pointed at me and I guess she meant Sara too, were not real women, we were mannequins to be exhibited with clothes and lace, but not to be taken to bed” (70).

On the whole, this island living that I have investigated, comes forth in the immigrant community who is under the impression that they will prosper in Peru because they are from the Old World and automatically superior in terms of race, intelligence and sophistication. The long-established Peruvian society obtains the greed from their connections to those with money. They see wealth within their reach and will try their hardest to get their hands in those piggy banks and if they cannot, resentment will arise.

b) The Solitude of Man

Solidarity is a ubiquitous theme whether communicating from an immigrant or minority perspective. Successfully integrating into society is not an easy undertaking and it can be inferred that people who cannot gain acceptance tend to feel anguish and remain outside the larger group in several aspects. In *The fragmented life of don Jacobo Lerner*, Jews make up a

tiny portion of Peruvian society and the only characters who are able to sustain their sanity (with the exception of Samuel Edelman) are those in Lima, where the majority of Jews reside within the tight borders of the Jewish community. What I have termed the “Tragic Trio” consists of Jacobo, Efraín and León Mitrani, all desolate individuals who are psychologically estranged from the rest of the world. Jacobo and León’s journey to complete alienation are basically the same. However, Mitrani is slightly more acclimated because he marries a Catholic and has his faith to cling on to in times of dejection.

Jacobo Lerner, the fallen protagonist, is the quintessential *Wandering Jew*, “in search of a home, a homeland, a sense of self and social acceptance” (Sheinin 22). In an article of the *Jewish Soul* titled, “The Wandering Jew,” the author, Fray Fernando, portrays the abysmal fantasy creature as an elderly man over one-hundred years old and over seven feet tall. He is dressed in black and carries a lamp that burns an eternal flame. Whenever seen, epidemics or droughts follow. Correspondingly, Jacobo is a ghost figure rarely heard in the first-person, an outcast who emerges from time to time only to induce chaos. The eternal flame held by Jacobo and his old friend, León, is the flame that represents the cynical aspect to the universal immigrant. Even Jacobo’s business travels do no justice to rid his solitude:

...what really bothered him and what he could not bring himself to admit, was that he could no longer bear his loneliness. The feeling had already begun to bother him in Chepén when he realized he was a man completely unattached, cut off from his traditions, and with absolutely no sense of direction. (84)

In his alienated state he opens up a brothel, which to him is just another business, an enterprise that may help him fit in and feel more “Peruvian” than by continuing as a peddler, a popular path for Jewish men. The satire is that this one is a scandalous endeavor at which he really does manage to succeed as an entrepreneur (Rosser 47).

Efraín’s discourse, like his life, exposes his merciless situation with:

...a hunger for identity and a consciousness of his difference. It is at once awkwardly structured, spontaneous discourse of a child and the precocious, fatalistic discourse of the spiritual orphan, abandoned by his parents, his family, and the representatives of the two religions that haunt and forsake him. (Friedman 76)

At the end of the novel, the father and son look like death, totally isolated and destroyed by society. Edelman quoting the Talmud audaciously states: “The Talmud says that everything has its time and its place so...no one should save Jacobo” (21). With this negative attitude coming from such a sensible character, Jacobo stands no chance of survival and sadly Efraín is not far behind.

c) Fragmentation at its Finest

When justifying the widespread *Island Phenomenon* in the context of a cultural archipelago, the notion of Fragmentation plays a leading role. Not only is it featured in the novel’s title, but evident in each and every page of this novel and every chapter of this thesis. Erecting islands and forming borders makes sense here because these people’s lives are so complicated and their past is broken up into tiny fragments. Water is the symbolic element that keeps the characters separated from one another and unable to form genuine, long-lasting, fruitful relationships. The idea of *polyphonic bricolage* maintains the novel’s individuality and for the most part supports my archipelago. The evidence of fragments is most obvious in the story’s structure; reflected in the incomplete, compartmentalized nature of Jacobo Lerner’s life as well as of Peruvian, Jewish and non-Jewish players. Goldemberg’s narrative strategy of multiple perspectivism especially emphasizes how fragmentation plays a role on the chronological, geographic and psychic spaces he creates (Rosser 44). In these scattered retrospective passages, key events in the protagonist’s life are covered from his birth in Russia in 1895 to his death in Lima in 1935; essentially “A revealed rather than resolved plot” (Friedman 74). As opposed to the typical chronological sequence of record keeping, the psychological

aspect of memory becomes the prevailing but often chaotic device for the temporal organization of the novel; life may be organized chronologically on paper but the interior being functions on its own watch. Particular cases that deal with the theme of fragmentation are through life and death jumbled together by shattered memories.

At the beginning the protagonist is on his death bed, trying desperately to find some coherence in his fragmented life (Stavans 5). The sole artifact Jacobo possesses from his past is an old portrait of his parents, plus the reminiscing with León, “were the only contacts Jacobo Lerner had with a past that was quickly breaking into small fragments as days went by...” (42). Jacobo lives his life in broken pieces and ever since he arrives in Peru as a traveling salesman: “This order of things in his mind was what he leaned on to survive in a country where the way people lived was extremely strange to him” (72). I understand his mentality as every time he tries to jump onto the train of normalcy, where almost everyone is present, he is able to touch the door for a split second then he just flies right off and after some time, gives up and sinks into a deep, one-of-a-kind depression that no man should have to endure. Alas, in the very end, Jacobo envisions his god-forsaken son, “as if through a veil, he saw...the fragmented image of his son praying on his knees in the church of Chepén” (176). Disdainfully, the one hallucination he has of his son is splintered and set in a Catholic Church, with Efraín dutifully praying, having no idea of his other half, his Jewish half.

Fragmentation follows the Jewish circle to their death with the cryptic passing of León Mitrani and the depressing, yet odd suicide of Miriam’s husband, Daniel Abramowitz. No one really knows how León dies; some say he was victim of the carelessness of the village druggist who gave him stain remover instead of bicarbonate of soda and some say he was crucified by the townspeople. Regardless, after several attempts by Edelman to find his body, it was never found:

“Now León’s bones are somewhere, who knows where, in the open, without a decent burial” (24). Conversely, Daniel’s death was clear and in Miriam’s matter-of-fact remark, practically defending her husband’s petty suicide, she states, “After he lost all his money playing poker, he had no choice but to kill himself” (65). When she recalls the episode further, she questions the pointlessness of Daniel traveling all the way to Peru just to die like a dog and “That night time broke into little pieces. Pieces, everywhere pieces of time...” (65). This unthinkable act, without doubt, changed Miriam permanently. Before, she was a relatively happy Jew living in Peru with a husband she adored and now she is bitter and consumed by the tiny fragments of his death. At the very least, Daniel was given a burial, although it was away from the other buried Jews: “That’s where Daniel rests, even today, all by himself. Sara said his grave is like a ‘little island’” (66). Evidently, committing an act such as suicide, having a baby out of wedlock with a Peruvian, owning a brothel, or becoming a religious fanatic will put your dead body on the outskirts of the cemetery, dissociated with the world, eternally buried in disgrace.

Chapter 3: Building and Breaking Bridges

“By his own will he had been expelled from the ancestral matrix, had cut the umbilical cord that tied him to the universe.” (Goldemberg 149)

Bridges are sturdy structures that keep us in the loop and connect us to whomever or whatever. When a bridge is destroyed, a connection is lost and the consequences can both good and bad. Jews, being a global culture, religion and race, living in all four corners of the world, share a mutual bond: “the commonality of the Diaspora serves as a link that unifies all of them” (Agosin xi). A comparison of two noteworthy Jewish migrations is the bridge between United States and Latin America. Both areas received a number of Jews during the three pivotal historical moments I mentioned in the Introduction. In any respect, after reading Rabbi Klenicki’s foreword, I was enlightened by an interesting divergence between Jews who settle in the United States and Jews who settled in Latin America. It is well-known that the United States was colonized by Protestants, people fleeing from religious persecution in Europe, and was inspired by the concept of separation between Church and State. Latin America, in clear contrast, was colonized by Spanish and Portuguese Catholic leaders who, on the whole, were not looking for a new life or a new religious freedom, hence Spanish and Portuguese colonization imposed a social order that was similar to the structure of Catholic Europe. Minorities were and are “tolerated” but seldom accepted totally.

For that reason, it is even more vital for immigrants of Latin America to establish stable connections and break off with the useless ones. Surviving in a foreign country is difficult but possible if concatenated to the right people and communities. While there is so much to be learned from this, we do know that it takes certain characteristics to succeed in a dog-eat-dog world. Undoubtedly in Goldemberg’s maze of characters, Jews and Peruvians compose a wide-range of channels and in the following sections we will get a taste of some of the more vital ones.

a) Old World vs. New World

Taken as a whole, this novel educates us on the various ways Goldemberg's immigrants preserve or break off connections with their native countries in the Old World. Maintaining relations with one's native and spiritual homeland definitely presents its obstacles, especially in Latin America, a traditionally homogenous society founded on the principles of Roman Catholicism. Regardless, Jews formed their own communities and in many ways they formed a bridge between their country of origin, spiritual homeland of the Holy Land and their new destination, in this case, Peru. Prime examples of ways Jewish immigrants sustain or break bridges from the Old World to the New World are through language, religious and cultural practices, memories, and attitudes towards current events.

Yiddish, the ancestral language of the majority of today's Latin American Jewish authors, is both a bridge connecting their Central and Eastern European forebears with the wider Jewish world and a fortress behind whose walls they might utter their secrets without fear of being overheard (Baker 142). Jacobo Lerner is the only person in the novel who makes a conscious effort to preserve the Yiddish language. While Jacobo was running his store in Chepén, his favorite childhood friend, León Mitrani, started to fall apart so the townspeople shunned him:

After a while, Jacobo was the only one who dared speak to Mitrani. When they met each other in public... Jacobo tried as hard as he could to keep the conversation in Yiddish and in that way disappoint the expectations of all those who stopped to listen. But, invariably, Mitrani would end up speaking the impeccable Spanish that he had learned by assiduously reading the Spanish version of the New Testament. (41)

Here we have Jacobo trying to use his deeply rooted religious/cultural language to get some privacy from the meddlesome people of Chepén. Ironically, Mitrani has not only refused to speak the language of the Old World, but reverts to the Spanish language he learned after reading the New Testament, something not correlated to the Jewish doctrine.

On the whole, there seems to be an overriding paranoia in the uncertainty expressed by the characters as to how to protect Jewish ways in Peruvian society (Rosser 49). The Jewish community in Lima in many respects succeeds in creating a separate identity for themselves. In the time span of this novel the Hebrew Union is able to obtain its own building; the theater group thrives; the library gets more books and the Jewish newspaper circulation increases. Triumphs of that nature help to keep the Jewish morale high and ease the progression into assimilation. On the religious level, Lima has a synagogue but what goes on in the synagogue is somewhat bogus—Jacobó only went while he was possessed by Mitrani's spirit and according to his omniscient narrator he would disturb the public with reprimands on the ostentation of the church goers.

Memories of the past seem to reoccur frequently with Goldemberg's forlorn cluster of individuals. Jacobó summarizes his feelings of the past quite poetically: "The vague, melancholy memory of a tenuous happiness in the Russian village of his birth, a happiness that he had never regained, forced him to think of God as a pitiless and arbitrary tyrant" (31). Sara and Miriam both compare their motherland of Vienna, Austria, with Lima and Sara Lerner even talks of returning:

Was it [my life] better in Vienna? I don't know. There's no comparison between Vienna and Lima. There are so many people without culture here, and the streets are perpetually dirty. Sometimes I feel like going back to Europe. Jacobó would take me if I asked him. (111)

Sara, unlike her husband Moisés, is not completely convinced that Lima is her home and a land full of dreams and opportunity. Her reminiscing clearly shows that she misses the Old World and even though returning is almost impossible, she knows that Jacobó would be the one to take her back because he is also very nostalgic.

Indeed Jacobo tries to rid himself of this dangerous plunge into the past through hard work and his love affair with Juana. However, “Weighed down by his own past, Jacobo cannot envision his own existence as moving forward with new possibilities. Too many shattering events have disrupted his sense of time and his place in it” (Rosser 47). Accordingly, certain characters never muse over their past. Samuel Edelman, in particular leads a pleasant life and boldly questions: “Why revive the past? Why remember things that make one’s head hurt?” (169). Edelman understands his Jewish compatriots are suffering because of the predicament of never starting anew and coming to Peru full of old, wasted memories: most of all not possessing what it takes to destroy these useless thoughts that are devastating to their character.

The manner the Jewish immigrants react to world news reflects the strength of their ties to the Old World. Needless to say, dispersed throughout the novel are various advertisements and announcements that concern the Old World, titles such as: “On the Jewish Origins of Hitler” (27), “The Effects of Hitler’s Policies” (29), “Jews murdered on the border of Russia and Rumania” (147) and “Give your financial support to the fellow Jews in Palestine!” (162). During this period of time, from 1923 to 1935, the world is in between two World Wars and Europe, in particular, is still in recovery. León Mitrani, the first Jew who arrived in Peru, lived a rough life in Russia as a soldier and saw many terrible things which left him permanently scarred. In Chapter One of the novel, Jacobo’s narrator asserts, “Mitrani never stopped being afraid that there would be a pogrom in Chepén. The murder of his uncle by the Czarist soldiers, in 1911, had been burned into his brain and remained there no matter what happened to him” (3). Mitrani is up-to-date with the news in Europe, predominantly concerning himself with the Nazis and the dire situation of Jews in Germany. Both Jacobo’s omniscient narrator and Samuel Edelman attest to León’s paranoia of pogroms and soon after Samuel declares Jacobo’s related lunacy: “I

couldn't talk to him about anything; he was lost, he had caught León's madness, always obsessed with Germans and pogroms" (23). The other characters show no real interest in the news unless it pertains directly to them. By and large, in Mitrani's example, obsessively following news on the Nazis and Jews of Germany seems to foster a lot of unnecessary and inflated fear that further isolates oneself.

As far as one can tell, breaking off connections with the Old World is not a terrible thing; however once the bridge has been severed, you are trapped in the realm of the New World and will never be able to find that same refuge in your native soil because you have crafted a new identity for yourself and embedded yourself in another place. According to the *Jewish Soul*, in an article named "Heroic Character of the Jewish Spirit," Dr. Paz Soldán states optimistically: "Because they have the faculty of total resignation, Jews have been able to survive as a nation with no territory without losing their strong, vital traditions" (155).

b) Samuel Edelman: The Jewish Connection

Samuel Edelman, a Jew originally from Vinnits, a small village in Ukraine, plays an important role in this novel. He is by far the most successful integrated Jew: marrying outside his religion and living in Chiclayo, away from the Jewish community in Lima. Even so, Samuel still maintains connections, for better or worse, with his fellow Jewish comrades: "I always brought him news of his boy, but it's not the same thing as having him by his side, taking care of him, and seeing him grow up strong and healthy, as it should be" (23). Samuel does what he can to lend a hand, but he knows it will never be enough. He defends his role avowing, "It's my duty, I tell Felisa, it's my duty as a Jew. But she doesn't understand. I try to explain to her, but she doesn't understand" (21). In this short segment, the goal is to show how Edelman is the glue that binds together the novel's three most fragile characters, better known as the "Tragic Trio."

Samuel was actually one of the founders of the Hebrew Union in Lima, however in this study his prime function is serving as a bridge between Jacobo in Lima and Efraín and Mitrani in Chepén. He helps to connect these characters in various ways. First, when he tells Jacobo where to find Mitrani shortly after Jacobo arrives in the country. Second, when he informs Jacobo of Mitrani's death and even makes burial arrangements, which end up not going as planned. Third, when he updates Jacobo on his son and after Mitrani dies, at Jacobo's request, goes to Chepén to retrieve Efraín and bring him back to Lima. Samuel is the only character who visits Efraín and transmits first-hand information on the state of Efraín to his wife and Jacobo:

He [Don Efraín Wilson] took me to a room without furniture, and there, in a corner, was Efraín, kneeling down, face to the wall. When he turned around he had a strange smile on his lips. Worse than the last time I had seen him! His clothes were dirty. He had the smell of death. I couldn't take him to Lima [to live with his father]. (169)

Samuel had come to Efraín's home at the request of dying Jacobo because Jacobo did not want him to have the same disaster-prone fate as Mitrani. Unfortunately not all bridges can be sustained, and this bridge between father and son was never going to survive on such a weak, initial foundation. Moreover, Edelman would not allow Efraín to be seen by his father primarily because of Efraín's terrible physique and state of mind. Besides, Jacobo was dying and seeing his son like this would only worsen his condition. For all intents and purposes, Jacobo had no real chance of ever meeting his son: "Jacobo could have gone to see him [Efraín] those times that he traveled to the north, but they would have killed him if he had gone into town...He would have to be crazy to appear at the Wilson's house after what happened..." (25).

Samuel Edelman did the best he could to be of assistance to his friends in need. However his job is tricky because as an immigrant, he is trying his hardest to fit in as well. Taken from personal experience, when Samuel tries to keep his Jewish comrades and their kin afloat, he is unintentionally making himself a stronger individual because his worries fall elsewhere and he

does not have the time to be too troubled with his own marginalization as a Jew in Peru. While Samuel Edelman does not alter the course of the Tragic Trio's lives, he is empathetic and genuinely does try to make a difference by sustaining the links that connect them to one another. Regrettably, their lives are predestined and Samuel Edelman is attempting the impossible—trying to patch an old, decrepit wooden bridge that is falling to pieces, drifting out to sea.

c) Jacobo: The Link to the World of Jews and Peruvians

Although most of the characters intermingle between surrounding ethnic communities, Jacobo's story is the most extreme. While Jacobo's relationship with his own kind is weak, his relations with Peruvians or non-Jews born in Peru, are just as pathetic. In plain words Castañeda affirms: "Es decir, por un lado el mundo judío con la específica historia del Jacobo y por otro, el mundo no-judío en la historia de la familia Wilson Alvarado" (296) [That is to say, on one side the Jewish world with the specific story of Jacobo and on the other, the world of the non-Jew, in the story of the Wilson Alvarado family]. If this section were a drawing, it would be a Venn diagram, with the overlapping circles of the Jewish and Peruvian communities and Jacobo covering a portion of both circles.

To quickly summarize, when Jacobo lived in Russia, he was a very devout Jew. He and his best childhood friend, León Mitrani dreamed of becoming scholars of the Torah one day and being respected by everyone in the community. When León went to war, Jacobo took care of his mother and later traveled to Germany to save up the funds needed to travel across the Atlantic. After the long journey to Peru, Jacobo started off leading a simple life as a peddler and established a shop in Chepén where he became infatuated with one of the local Peruvian girls, Bertila Wilson. While it was nice and innocent in the beginning, once Bertila becomes with child, Jacobo's life turns upside down. Jacobo flees town and will never know his son. This

tragic abandonment turns Jacobo into a psychological mess, eventually leading to his assumed premature death.

For the most part, Peruvians and Jews do not mix on a personal level, only for business and as Sara declares: “What madness to have a son with an Indian woman!” (117). Sara’s point is valid to an extent because of all the hardships associated in raising a child with a dual identity. Moreover, Sara’s statement shows her ignorance of the Peruvian population, calling Bertila an Indian when she is really a *mestiza*, part Indian, English, Spanish and Andalucian.

As the fallen hero of the novel, Jacobo is not revealed in first-person narrative, making the fragmented bits of information and narrative substantial in understanding Jacobo’s dynamic character in an interrupted time frame. Jacobo is an evolved character; still his changes are more obscure since we do not witness them from his perspective like we do with Efraín. Bearing that in mind, Jacobo’s connections with Peruvians and other Jews are based off of the daily announcements, letters to the Editor and testimonies in his third-person character as well as the other five interior monologues.

On the other side, Efraín is a changed character, linked to his father in terms of a destiny of bad luck, isolation and a conflictive identity. In the beginning, Efraín’s response to everyone who criticized his father and his Jewish identity was to reaffirm his commitment to Catholicism: “I have no father. My only father is Jesus Christ, who is in heaven with the Holy Family” (14). In other words, there was never an actual bridge connecting the two. They were both allegorically drowning together within the waters of the archipelago. Efraín, being the naïve, estranged child as he was, built imaginary connections of his father in the form of twisted fairy-tale dreams. If Jacobo emulates León’s destructive path, then Efraín surely copies Jacobo in that same respect. When Efraín comes face-to-face with León Mitrani, Mitrani testifies: ““You look just like your

father,' he said to me. 'You have the same eyes, the same nose, and those big, big ears. All one has to do is look at you and one can tell you are one of ours'" (93). This observation is of great magnitude because no matter what Efraín does to fit into his mother's family and the rest of the town, his physical appearance will always give him away as an outsider and constantly remind everyone of Jacobo's deceit. It is important to note that Efraín, technically, is not Jewish. At the start of the novel, he goes to mass every Sunday with Aunt Francisca and soon becomes an altar boy as well as the favorite of Father Chirinos. Nevertheless, his attempts to fit in the Catholic Church eventually fail because of his absent Jewish father who inadvertently taints his identity and renders him forever impure.

In addition, when Bertila Wilson, Efraín's birthmother starts building a connection with Jacobo, a seemingly good natured Jew, everything is fine at first. Even Bertila's father sees potential in Jacobo because he assumes that he is a well-off Jew and a suitable match for one of his daughters. One day, after don Efraín visits Jacobo's store it becomes apparent of his initial impression of Jacobo: "When the last customer leaves, don Efraín approaches the counter, smiling, and shakes hands firmly and energetically with Jacobo" (17). Don Efraín Wilson even invites Jacobo to dinner and despite León Mitrani's warnings, Jacobo accepts the invitation. As the reader, one can see this advice is foreshadowing of what is to come: León Mitrani has lived in Chepén longer than Jacobo and knows the ins and outs of a typical Peruvian town so his warnings should not have been overlooked. All in all, the tie between Bertila and Jacobo becomes very weak and fractured because the two completely broke the unwritten rules of society and fabricated an undesirable bridge by having a baby out of wedlock with parents of two different religions and ethnicities. For this reason, according to Jacobo, he does not have any other option besides removing his physical ties with Bertila and his son. Although the mental

link is still there, considering that for the rest of his life Jacobo will be severely troubled that he never met his son, while Bertila will be forever traumatized that he deserted them. Out of all of this mishap, Efraín will become the deprived victim, a spiritual orphan, belonging to no one because of what he represents. Sadly, Efraín is a product of the prejudice his town and mother's family hold of Jews stemming from the negative experiences they have had with León and Jacobo.

Jacobo links himself to both sides through his financial support of Efraín, Moisés, Miriam, Sara, Juana, Jewish burials of Daniel Abramowitz and Marcos Geller, and sometimes the Jewish community. Edelman, an honest man, reacts to Jacobo's squandering by saying:

Who was he? A nobody. That's why he wanted everyone to love him, gave out money right and left. It's not bad to help Moisés, or Marquitos' widow, but to lend money to people who you know are not going to give it back is madness. Charity is one thing, and wasting money is another, says the Talmud. (22)

This is Jacobo's shallow attempt to blend in with both societies, however, once again, Jacobo falls short and as shown in the part on Greed, people will take advantage of this clueless generosity.

In the end, Jacobo "thinks that neither the affection he feels for his sister-in-law, nor his relationship with Juana, nor the satisfactory economic situation has been enough to give meaning to his life" (164). To a large extent, Jacobo's attempts to internalize himself with the Jewish community and externalize himself in the Peruvian one fail and he is left on the extreme periphery, hopelessly trapped.

Chapter Four: Polyphonic Bricolage

“Each culture has a close relationship to its ethnographic location, to its local environment while universal models tend to reduce a culture.” (Schmidt 30)

In Bettina E. Schmidt’s article, “The Many Voices of Caribbean Culture in New York City” she develops her own, innovative concept of *polyphonic bricolage* and relates it to her studies on Caribbean culture in New York City. Although her research is not directed towards Jews in Latin America, there is still enough flexibility within her concept that I have made it applicable to Jewish immigrants as well. The term “bricolage” implies that a culture is never complete, but in an ongoing state of change while “polyphonic” exemplifies that such a concept has to be described in many voices, equal in value, instead of creating the idea of a homogenous entity (Schmidt 24). Her main argument is that ethnic communities around the world are unique; she is against the notion to design an unwavering image of culture:

Nevertheless, despite [their] differences, these models [mestizaje, hybridization, creolization, etc.] have a monologueic perspective in common that creates the impression that the members of a group speak with one voice. The theories often neglect that a number of individuals construe a culture speaking with different but equivalent voices. Identity has to be continuously negotiated, in a process that never ends. (28)

Polyphonic bricolage essentially emphasizes the establishment of a trans-Jewish community and the ever-changing experiences of both present and future generations of immigrants. In accordance with this statement, as previously explained in *La isla que se repite*, the meta-archipelago has islands that move in a cyclic, yet chaotic motion. The reasoning behind incorporating this new theory into my fabrication of a Jewish cultural archipelago is to show that this cultural development is an ongoing process and what Goldemberg coined represents one personal view that can be shared by others, even up to the present day. In *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Ilan Stavans expresses how he is inspired by Goldemberg’s work:

I immediately identified with Goldemberg's novel, finding it so magnetic, so enclosed in me, so ready to be interpreted and be interpreted by it. His novel's protagonist, his mistress, his in-laws, his bastard child Efraín were not characters invented out of the blue. The apathy felt by the characters toward Peru mirrored perfectly that of my fellow Mexican Jews. Therein, it seems to me, is Goldemberg's lesson: by their sheer inquisitiveness, his characters justified me, e.g., they proved that my existential dilemma, my duality—Jewish and Hispanic—was not, as I often feared, a mere oxymoron but a legitimate conflict out of which art, germane and memorable, could emerge. (5)

This is only one opinion but it clearly shows that Jews from different communities share several commonalities, mainly how to come to grips with their multifaceted identity in a region so strongly distinguished for its cultural uniformity. It is quite apparent that the world of Goldemberg's characters is chaotic and even if their personalities are slightly exaggerated, they are nevertheless applicable to the global citizen (Sheinin 34). By severing Jacobo's story into numerous parts, many voices are heard, both from Jews and non-Jews. Together, these individuals express a whole, which represents the Jews' sentiments as they confront their past (Sheinin 79).

Schmidt's contention is valid in declaring that cultures are composed of elements of different ones and these elements tend to change depending on the situation, location, time and creators. However, when dealing with the Jewish population one has to understand their exceptionality. While Jews all over the world have persevered as nation-less nomads, they have still been able to maintain a distinct individuality and collective union for over two-thousand years (Goldberg 59). Placing the novel's characters into a Jewish cultural archipelago expresses their individuality but also their sameness. Just as the majority of literary critics discuss the novel's universality to Jewish life, I wish to argue that it still maintains a unique edge and deserves an innovative concept like *polyphonic bricolage* that defends its diversity.

In effect, the concepts of *polyphonic bricolage* and the cultural archipelago complement each other quite lucratively. These corresponding ideas further aid to my particular study of Jewish Latin American literature because with a cultural archipelago, the goal is focused inwards to maintain a collective or institutional identity, consisting of different components all struggling against the host culture; while the idea of *polyphonic bricolage* puts an outward focus on each individual component within a culture and the unique function it possesses in a universal framework. To a large extent, *polyphonic bricolage* boosts the diversity factor within the cultural archipelago insinuating that there are numerous ways people integrate themselves into a society and it is important to recognize the assortment of cultures that emerge from changing peoples and changing times.

Conclusions

Despite the small Jewish population in Peru, their presence and acclimatization into society is critical in understanding the plight of all Jews, a community so globally dispersed. Under these circumstances, Jews make up a hybridist society with the array of languages, ethnicities and customs that surround them in the foreign lands they inhabit. Although religion may play a primary role in their cultural makeup, this is not so much the case anymore. Religion is still influential but contemporary Jews seem to relate themselves in other areas of society, taking on more secular attitudes. As with Goldemberg's novel, religion was what first united them, but not what would characterize their newborn community in Peru, which upheld its own union, newspaper, theatre, library and social events, just to name a few.

Inherently, "Jews present an almost timeless and mystical universe, a zone where the human being is eternally condemned to solitude and escape. Writing becomes the retrieval acts of memory" (Agosin xii). Isaac Goldemberg, the first Peruvian Jew to publish a work of fiction, paints an exquisite portrait of the Jewish Peruvian community in writing form that is quite stirring. Goldemberg incorporates his own biography not only in the storyline but in the pessimistic tone of the novel as well, revealing the challenges one has to face to juggle perfectly their culture with society. From his experimental narrative format to the five revealing personal discourses, the reader becomes immersed in the gossip and revelations of this tightly woven group of individuals. With the use of a cultural archipelago, Jewish identity in Peru during this short period of time can be clarified and explained, allowing us to map out key characters, their relationship with one another, and how this formation constructs its own array of islands. While relatively few Latin American Jews have conveyed their stories in writing: "At the same time, viewing Latin American societies from a Jewish perspective challenges the traditional notion of

these societies as monolithic, a notion that perpetuates the nationalist view of Jews as disturbers of some uniform, ideal society, unalterably Hispanic and Catholic” (Elkin xi). Isaac Goldemberg’s story is one of millions whereas his innovative construction of Jacobo Lerner triggers a voice no one has heard, but almost everyone can relate to.

So far my conclusions show that this small Jewish community in Peru is imperative in understanding the mental, physical and spiritual journey of all Jews. For the most part, it seems as though Jews have three choices when immigrating to Latin America: either isolate themselves, integrate, or assimilate- each carrying their own set of consequences. To reiterate this assumption, Judith Elkin questions, “Subjected to the cultural imperatives of Hispanic Catholicism, can Jews survive as Jews, or are they destined to assimilate or emigrate?” (xiv)

Generally speaking, I believe this research not only pertains to the Jewish community, but to anyone interested or affected by the immigrant way of life. The story itself is important because it not only applies to Jewish immigrants living in Peru but to anyone who has ever left their home to reside in a completely new place. Most of us have experience in some if not all of the problems these Jewish immigrants have faced: isolation, selfishness, fear, abandonment, etc. This novel and my analysis of it simply affirms that our lives are not organized, chronological, or even fair—life is messy, incredibly fragmented, and at times, extremely unjust. We can all relate to Goldemberg’s characters in one way or another, and living in a country founded by foreigners, it is essential to realize as well as empathize with the newly arrived, unsettled migrant population who are trying to find their niche in an unfamiliar land.

Although my research brings no irrefutable answer to the Jewish immigrant issue, I feel as though my interpretation of this novel by way of a geographical archipelago covers a broad spectrum and embodies scores of sub-themes, opening doors for further inquiry. I realize my use

of the cultural archipelago may seem hazy, perhaps a too far of reach, however I feel there are very few other ways to fully interpret the ramifications this novel bears.

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